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AUTHOR Raffield, Barney T., III
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ABSTRACT

The concept of cultural universals, the basic needs shared by people around the world, is a critical concept in assessing the impact of culture on decisions about the international marketing of goods and services. In most cases, international marketers have little need to understand all the ways in which their culture differs from the culture of the countries in which they wish to market their products. A basic outline of cultural differences can be created through analysis of a culture's primary message system. The primary message system model of Edward Hall can assist the marketer in avoiding self-reference criteria in analyzing the culture's characteristic behaviors and attitudes, and can provide a perspective from which to view another culture's complexities. International marketing managers must select a critical message system and study how it intersects with others if they are to ascertain the impact of culture on the use of, or demand for, goods and services. Adoption of the primary message system can be accomplished either through: (1) observation, during which the observer becomes a real member of the society; or (2) fieldwork, which requires less investment of time and other resources. These forms of information gathering can be assisted by analysis of the culture's terminal values or objectives and the values that guide achievement of those objectives. (MSE)

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MARKETING ACROSS CULTURES: TOOLS FOR CULTURAL ASSESSMENT

by

Dr. Barney T. Raffield, III
Associate Professor of Marketing

Bryant College
Smithfield, RI 02917-1284

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By Barney T. Raffield, III

Introduction

Interpreting the impact of culture upon a group is always a very difficult challenge, as culture is both ubiquitous and subtle in nature. One's own enculturation often obscures his or her understanding of other cultures; and almost inevitably, one tends to see other cultures only in terms of their similarities to, and differences from, his or her own culture. This phenomenon is known as "self-reference criterion" (Lee 1966). Individuals most often use their own culture as a primary frame of reference; and, consequently, it is extremely rare that they are able to use objectivity in either studying or evaluating the substance of other cultures. Therefore, where should an international marketer begin to assess any particular culture?

Boundaries of and Limits to Cultural Assessment

Whenever any firm is considering the marketing of products or services to international market segments, the firm's marketing personnel should be aware that cultural differences stand out more frequently than cultural similarities. Any nation's culture serves as a primary means by which members of that culture solve both routine and complex problems, and learn to cope effectively with their environment. Products and services must address consumer needs and solve purchasing problems if they are to be viable and successful in either domestic or international markets. A marketer must ascertain whether a particular product or service fills a recognized and appropriate consumer need within a specific foreign culture. If the product or service does, then the cultural differences between the domestic firm's culture and that of the particular

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foreign market are not as relevant as is the similarity of consumer needs between one culture and another.

In assessing cultural impact within an international market, the multinational marketer must realize that a number of barriers must be overcome. One major barrier is the aforementioned tendency for a marketer from one culture to interpret another culture using "selective perception," or more simply stated, using his or her own culture as the only frame of reference. A second barrier is that while cultural similarities most often capture the attention of the international marketer, it is frequently cultural differences that provide the "fly in the ointment" to the success of products and services marketed in other cultures. Exhibit 1 shows some "cultural universals" in an effort to point out that people throughout the world do have many similar needs, although cultural differences can be very marked. Finally, culture is inculcated, and is, therefore, learned. There can be wide variations within a single culture which are as equally critical as the importance of similarities and differences between cultures in assessing the impact of a nation's cultural environment on the tastes, preferences, and trends of its consumers.

Tools for Cultural Assessment

Unfortunately, many firms, particularly those which are small in size or entering international markets for the first time, do not have the economic resources, the time, nor the required expertise to assess patterns of cultural influence in international markets. Are any shortcut methods available which would assist the international marketer in forecasting the cultural impact on the demand for goods and services in a particular foreign market? Although certainly not a "quick-fix" method, the analysis offered by Edward T. Hall can

Exhibit 1
Cultural Universals

Age grading	Food taboos	Music
Athletic sports	Funeral rites	Mythology
Bodily adornment	Games	Numerals
Calendars	Gestures	Obstetrics
Cleanliness training	Gift giving	Penal sanctions
Community organization	Government	Personal names
Cooking	Greetings	Population policy
Cooperative labor	Hair styles	Postnatal care
Cosmology	Hospitality	Pregnancy usages
Courtship	Housing hygiene	Property rights
Dancing	Incest taboos	Propitiation of
Decorative arts	Inheritance rules	supernatural beings
Divination	Joking	Puberty customs
Division of labor	Kin groups	Religious rituals
Dream interpretation	Kinship nomenclature	Residence rules
Education	Language	Sexual restrictions
Eschatology	Law	Soul concepts
Ethics	Luck superstitions	Status differentiation
Ethnobotany	Magic	Surgery
Etiquette	Marriage	Tool making
Faith healing	Mealtimes	Trade
Family	Medicine	Visiting
Feasting	Modesty concerning	Weaning
Fire making	natural functions	Weather control
Folklore	Mourning	

Source: George P. Murdock, "The Common Denominator of Cultures," The Science of Man in the World Crises, Ralph Linton (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1945, pp. 123-142.

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provides a means whereby such a cultural impact can be studied. Hall's basic premise for understanding culture is that it consists of systems for structuring the interaction within a society. Interaction can be person with person, person with things, person with environment, resident with outsiders, man with woman, etc. Hall has organized his perspective of culture into a framework which identifies "primary message systems," or cultural rules for human activity. These primary message systems are provided in Exhibit 2.

The international marketer, through investigating each of the areas identified in Exhibit 2, can better divorce himself or herself from self-reference criterion and more easily analyze and understand the varied complexities and intricacies of other cultures. Such an analysis is more appropriate for a more broad-based cultural understanding, and very often marketers do not need to engage in such an in-depth analytical exercise; rather, they need to ascertain the cultural impact upon their own specific issues: demand or use of a product, influences in the purchase decision, organization structure, relations with employees, etc. For this type of analysis, Hall believes that we should investigate the "intersection" of message systems (Hall 1959). For example, if marketers wish to understand how a particular culture shapes an individual's attitudes toward work, they must first understand that work messages are associated with each of the other message systems. How do people interact in work situations? What work roles are reserved for instructing others? Each message has an intersection with each other one. For instance, subsistence impacts on learning, and learning impacts on subsistence messages (Cundiff and Hilger 1984).

In applying such an analysis to specific business purposes, all that is necessary is to choose a message system with which to begin. A top

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Exhibit 2

The Primary Message System of Edward Hall's Silent Language

1. **Interaction.** The interaction within the environment through different modes, such as speech and writing.
 2. **Association.** The structure and organization of society and its various components.
 3. **Subsistence.** The perspectives of activities of individuals and groups which deal with livelihood and living.
 4. **Bisexuality.** The differentiation of roles and functions along gender lines.
 5. **Territoriality.** The possession, use, and defense of land and territory.
 6. **Temporality.** The division and allocation of time and its use for various activities.
 7. **Learning.** The patterns of transmitting knowledge.
 8. **Play.** The process of enjoyment through relaxation and recreation
 9. **Defense.** The protection against natural and human forces in the environment.
 10. **Exploitation.** The application of skills and technology to turn natural resources to people's needs.
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Source: Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language, Garden City, NY: Doubleday Publishing, 1959, pp. 61-81.

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manufacturer might choose to study the interaction of "play" with other message systems; cosmetic marketers might use the "bisexuality" message system; and a chemical firm might use the "exploitation" system message system to study its impact within the culture on use of, and demand for, its products. An example of the framework for such an analysis for the toy manufacturer might look like Exhibit 3 (Cundiff and Hilger 1984).

Hall's framework for cultural analysis is only one method to use in a cultural evaluation. An assessment of a particular nation's culture for marketing purposes also requires an analysis of the people's attitudes, motivations, perceptions, and learning processes (Jain 1987). Exhibit 4 more succinctly summarizes the cultural determinants. The information provided in this exhibit attempts to relate associate cultural traits with marketing decisions. For instance, simply knowing about the religion or morality of a culture is not sufficient in and of itself. The marketer must understand if the introduction of a particular product or service into another country will in any way, either directly or indirectly, conflict with the recognized cultural norms of that society. A careful scrutiny of major advertising themes and copy, with a strong understanding and appreciation of the particular culture in question, can be extremely helpful in preventing culturally related problems and blunders in marketing products and services to other nations.

Social scientists have used observation and fieldwork as the traditional means to study the cultural norms or values of any given society. International marketers have also found that these methods are quite appropriate for their needs in assessing the cultural impact of particular decisions in the marketing of goods and services in other nations. Observation involves the researcher being an active member of the culture for a

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Exhibit 3

Business Applications of Edward Hall's Primary Message Systems

Intersections of Primary Message Systems	Sample Questions Concerning Cultural Patterns Significant for Marketing Toys and Games
Interaction/play	How do people interact during play in regard to competitiveness, instigation, or leadership?
Play/interaction	What games are played involving acting, role-playing, or other aspects of real-world interaction?
Association/play	Who organizes play, and how do the organization patterns differ?
Play/association	What games are played about organization: for example, team competitions and games involving kings, judges, or leader-developed rules and penalties?
Subsistence/play	What are the significant factors regarding people such as distributors, teachers, coaches, or publishers who make their livelihood from games?
Play/subsistence	What games are played about work roles in society such as doctors, nurses, and firemen?
Bisexuality/play	What are the significant differences between the sexes in the sports, games, and toys enjoyed?
Play/bisexuality	What games and toys involve bisexuality: for example, dolls, dressing up, and dancing?
Territoriality/play	Where are the games played, and what are the limits observed in houses, parks, streets, schools, etc.
Play/territoriality	What games are played about space and ownership? For example, monopoly?
Temporality/play	At what ages and what time periods are games played?
Play/temporality	What games are played involving time? Telling time?
Learning/play	What patterns of coaching, tuition, and training exist for learning games?
Play/learning	What games are played involving learning and knowledge? For example, quizzes?
Defense/play	What are the safety rules for games and toys?
Play/defense	What war and defense games and toys are utilized?
Exploitation/play	What resources and technology are permitted or utilized for games and sport: for example, hunting and fishing rules, use of parks, cameras, vehicles, etc.
Play/exploitation	What games and toys about technology or exploitation are used; for example, scouting, chemical sets, microscopes?

Source: Stefan H. Robock and Kenneth Simmonds, International Business and Multinational Enterprises, Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1983, p. 417.

Exhibit 4

Outline of Cross-Cultural Analysis of Consumer Behavior

1. **Determine relevant motivations in the culture.**
What needs are fulfilled with this product in the minds of members of the culture? How are these needs presently fulfilled? Do members of this culture readily recognize these needs?
2. **Determine characteristic behavior patterns.**
What patterns are characteristic of purchasing behavior? What forms of division of labor exist within the family structure? How frequently are products of this type purchased? What size packages are normally purchased? Do any of these characteristic behaviors conflict with behavior expected for this product? How strongly ingrained are the behavior patterns which conflict with those needed for distribution of this product?
3. **Determine what broad cultural values are relevant to this product.**
Are their strong values about work, morality, religion, family relations, etc., which relate to this product? Does this product connote attributes which are in conflict with these cultural values? Can conflicts with values be avoided by changing the product? Are their positive values in this culture with which the product might be identified?
4. **Determine characteristic forms of decision-making.**
Do members of the culture display a studied approach to decisions concerning innovations or an impulsive approach? What is the form of the decision process? Upon what information sources do members of the culture rely? Do members of the culture tend to be rigid or flexible in the acceptance of new ideas? What criteria do they use in evaluating alternatives?
5. **Evaluate promotion methods appropriate to the culture.**
What role does advertising occupy in the culture? What themes, words, or illustrations are taboo? What language problems exist in present markets which cannot be translated into this culture? What types of salespeople are accepted by members of the culture? Are such salespeople available?
6. **Determine appropriate institutions for this product in the minds of consumers.**
What types of retailers and intermediary institutions are available? What services do these institutions offer which are expected by the consumer? What alternatives are available for obtaining services needed for the product, but not offered by existing institutions? Will changes in the distribution structure be readily accepted?

Source: James F. Engel, Roger D. Blackwell, and David T. Kollat, Consumer Behavior (3d ed.), Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1978, p. 90

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relatively lengthy periods of time in order to fully appreciate the patterns of living within that society. Fieldwork is concerned with collecting information relevant to particular areas of interest in the culture and does not require the researcher to become a real member of the culture itself. Of course, because of the time and financial constraints involved, most businesses will choose the fieldwork method rather than the observation method. One widely used method for assessing culture has been offered by Rokeach who developed a list of eighteen terminal and instrumental values (see Exhibit 5). His framework can be effectively utilized in discriminating among people of culturally diverse backgrounds (Munson and McIntyre 1978).

Conclusion

Cultural universals, basic needs shared in common by people throughout the world, are a critical concept in assessing the impact of culture on decisions of marketers as they relate to marketing goods and services in various international markets. In most cases international marketers have little need to understand all the ways in which their culture differs from others in which they wish to market their products. A basic outline of cultural differences can be created through analysis of a culture's primary message system. Yet, international marketing managers must select a critical message system and study how it intersects with others if he or she is to be able to ascertain the impact of culture on the use of, or demand for, their respective goods and services.

Marketing has always been recognized as an economic activity involving the exchange of goods and services for something of comparable value. However, socio-cultural influences have now been identified as highly important

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Exhibit 5

Terminal and Instrumental Values

Terminal Value	Instrumental Value
A comfortable life (a prosperous life)	Ambitious (hardworking, aspiring)
An exciting life (a stimulating, active life)	Broadminded (open-minded)
A sense of accomplishment (lasting contribution)	Capable (competent, effective)
A world at peace (free of war and conflict)	Cheerful (lighthearted, joyful)
A world of beauty (beauty of nature and the arts)	Clean (neat, tidy)
Equality (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all)	Courageous (standing up for your beliefs)
Family security (taking care of loved ones)	Forgiving (willing to pardon others)
Freedom (independence, free choice)	Helpful (working for the welfare of others)
Happiness (contentedness)	Honest (sincere, truthful)
Inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict)	Imaginative (daring, creative)
Mature love (sexual and spiritual intimacy)	Independent (self-reliant)
National security (protection from attack)	Intellectual (intelligent, reflective)
Pleasure (enjoyable, leisurely life)	Logical (consistent, rational)
Salvation (saved, eternal life)	Loving (affectionate, tender)
Self-respect (self-esteem)	Obedient (dutiful, respectful)
Social recognition (respect, admiration)	Polite (courteous, well-mannered)
True friendship (close companionship)	Responsible (dependent, reliable)
Wisdom (a true understanding of life)	Self-controlled (self-disciplined)

Source: M. Rokeach, The Nature of Human Values, New York: Free Press, 1972, p. 28.

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determinants of marketing behavior (Terpstra 1987). Since the typical marketing manager's understanding of marketing is bounded by his or her culture, he or she must acquire a knowledge of diverse cultural environments in order to succeed in international marketing ventures. As world nations become more and more interdependent on each other, greater awareness and understanding of different cultures become increasingly more important in conducting world trade effectively.

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